

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

New edition of 'Our History' launched at Havana Book Fair
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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

VOL. 82/NO. 7 FEBRUARY 19, 2018

Revolution's 1961 literacy drive 'changed Cuban society'

BY TED LEONARD
AND MIDGE TANNENBAUM

HARTFORD, Conn. — Cuban revolutionary Griselda Aguilera began an eight-state and District of Columbia tour Jan. 30 with a dinner and program at a Puerto Rican restaurant in Holyoke, Massachusetts. When she was 7 years old, Aguilera was the youngest of tens of thousands of volunteers who responded to the call of Fidel Castro and other leaders of the revolution to join a nationwide campaign to teach Cuban workers and peasants to read and write.

The next day she spoke to more than 50 people at Central Connecticut State University here. The pizza-lunch event was sponsored by eight university groups, including the Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Center; the Office of Diversity and Equity; the Educational Opportunity Program and the Center for Africana Studies; as well as the Hartford Coalition on Cuba. The coalition organized a citywide meeting at a community

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Kurds mobilize to fight against Turkish assault

Protests spread against invasion of Afrin



Mustafa Abdi

Jan. 25 protest and funeral in Afrin for civilians and combatants killed by Turkish bombardment and ground attack on the Kurdish-controlled region in northwestern Syria.

BY TERRY EVANS

The Turkish rulers invasion and war against the Kurdish people and their allies in Syria's Afrin province is meeting determined resistance and making little military progress so far.

Ankara's continuous air and artillery bombardment has killed over 100 civilians and Kurdish fighters. Some 16,000 people have been forced to flee their homes.

The Kurds are winning support from working people in Kurdish and other regions in Syria, Iraq and worldwide. In Turkey, the government of

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Liberals praise FBI in fight over probe into Donald Trump

BY EMMA JOHNSON
AND JOHN STUDER

"Trump Has Picked a Fight with the FBI. He'll Be Sorry," reads a headline in the Feb. 1 *Washington Post*. The headline expresses what the owners of the liberal media and the middle-class left wish to be the result in a sharp political confrontation over revelations that the Democrats are using Washington's political police as part of the "resistance" to Donald Trump's presidency.

At the heart of the debate is a memo drafted by the Republican members of the House Intelligence Committee released by the White House Feb. 2.

The memo explains that leaders of the FBI, in an effort to get a warrant to spy on Donald Trump's campaign and since, relied on a dossier authored by a Trump-hating former British spy, Christopher Steele, who had been hired by the Hillary Clinton campaign to write it.

Former FBI Director James Comey played the key role in getting Clinton off the hook for the thousands of secret government documents she put on her personal computer. Trump fired him for abrogating the authority of the Justice Department when he did.

The memo outlines how Comey and

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Join the May Day Brigade to Cuba, emulate Cuban Revolution at home



Yoandry Avila Guerra

May Day march in Havana, 2017. International brigade to Cuba this year will talk to workers, farmers across country and join march in Havana. Banner says, "Always rebel youth."

The *Militant* urges workers and youth to sign up for the April 22-May 6 May Day Brigade to Cuba.

The bosses' press doesn't tell the truth

EDITORIAL

about Cuba and the Cuban Revolution. It's not just that the capitalist rulers and their media tell outright lies, although they do. Like the slander that U.S. Em-

bassy personnel in Havana were attacked by a nonexistent "sonic weapon."

The capitalist media is incapable of understanding a society where the propertied owners don't rule. Where decisions are based not on how to maximize profit, but on increasing the consciousness, unity, discipline and solidarity of the working classes. The way the Cuban people say, "no one is left on their own."

That is reason enough to go see the

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US rulers tell Puerto Rico: Squeeze working people to pay off bonds!

BY SETH GALINSKY

Hundreds of thousands of workers and farmers in Puerto Rico are still without electricity five months after Hurricane Maria. Damaged schools

remain unrepaired across the island. Tens of thousands of homes have no roofs. And thousands of jobs have evaporated.

What has been the response of Washington's Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico — what people

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Nassar conviction gain for women, judge's conduct undercuts rights

BY LEA SHERMAN

The exposure of the extent of sexual abuse by sports doctor Lawrence Nassar, who worked for the U.S.A. Gymnastics team, the United States Olympic Committee, Michigan State University, Karolyi ranch and other sports training centers, has drawn international attention and revulsion. In January more than 150 girls and young women testified at his trial on the sexual abuse they had suffered at Nassar's hands. He pled guilty to seven counts of sexual assault.

Nassar was supposed to care for

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—On the picket line, p. 5—

Bus workers stand up to bosses in Seattle, Quebec, Manchester

Albany hotel workers beat back concession contract demands

UK ‘guilt by association’ law is aimed at the working class

BY CAROLINE BELLAMY

MANCHESTER, England — Fighters against frame-up “guilt by association” convictions here have picked up and broadened their campaign.

In recent decades the capitalist rulers have used the 300-year-old joint enterprise law to railroad thousands of working people to prison for life. It’s part of efforts to paint layers of workers as a dangerous “underclass,” in thrall to criminal gangs.

In 2016 the Supreme Court ruled the law had been misinterpreted for the previous 30 years, raising hopes that convictions would be overturned and that cops and prosecutors would stop using it to target people. But two years later, joint enterprise charges continue to be used and those convicted remain in jail.

“They do it for ease,” Janet Cunliffe, a leader of Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association, told the *Militant*. Her son Jordan is in prison for life after being convicted of joint enterprise at the age of 15. “They don’t need full proof for each person. And you can be convicted on such tenuous evidence that it makes people scared. It’s an attack on the presumption of innocence.”

The joint enterprise law is too useful a weapon against the working class for the capitalist rulers to let go of it easily. Touted as a way of securing easier convictions against criminal gangs — a real problem in some areas — the law allows prosecutors to charge individuals based on who they associate with, not what they did.

In fact, the rulers care little about the consequences of gang warfare

on working people. Their laws, cops and courts exist to protect their class interests and defend their rule, not to aid workers in preventing anti-social behavior.

Like conspiracy laws, joint enterprise gives the rulers a tool they will use to intimidate and go after workers when they start to fight back against the impact of the worldwide capitalist crisis. Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association was formed in 2010 by prisoners framed up under the law and their families. They stepped up the campaign to get the convictions overturned last November when it became clear that the 2016 ruling hadn’t changed anything.

“I don’t want to be doing this for another 10 years,” Cunliffe said, “and I don’t want the Moss Side ladies to either.” She was referring to relatives and friends of 10 young men from Moss Side in Manchester who were framed up for the murder of Abdul Hafidah and sentenced for up to 23 years after the Supreme Court ruling.

In his sentencing remarks the judge admitted that only one of the group of 11 that had chased Hafidah had killed him, but the all-Caucasian juries convicted six of the others of murder as well. The four other youth were convicted of manslaughter. All the defendants are black.

Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association members reached out to the families. “I’m not saying they shouldn’t be punished if they’ve done something, but they are not murderers,” said Joanne Collier, cousin of one of the 10.



Courtesy of Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association

Jan. 25 march at House of Commons in London protests government’s use of ‘joint enterprise’ law to railroad people to prison. “It’s an attack on the presumption of innocence,” said Janet Cunliffe, a leader of Joint Enterprise: Not Guilty by Association, which organized the march.

“We’re doing all we can to get the word out,” said Jade Ramsey, the girlfriend of one of the other convicted youth. She and other Moss Side relatives have joined the group’s London and Manchester demonstrations. They’ve spoken to Members of Parliament at the House of Commons, leafleted at other social protests and talked to the Unison trade union’s Black Members conference.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates that up to 4,600 people were prosecuted for murder under the joint enterprise law between 2005 and 2013. There are no official figures.

The fight by families of those convicted is expanding. “Fighting with us has made the Moss Side families not feel shame,” Cunliffe said. “I felt I couldn’t go out without people thinking ‘you’re the mother of a murderer.’”

Use bosses’ bribes to build Socialist Workers Party!

“Enclosed is the biweekly ‘incentive pay’ I received from the steel bosses for \$63.36,” wrote Nadine Carr from Chicago. “I’m glad to send this blood money in to advance the work of the communist movement.” To speed up production, a computer system at the mill where she works tracks how fast each coil is processed, reporting if the pace is “below par,” or if the mill stops for more than two minutes. “We’ve had quite a bit of discussion on my crew about how this is designed to push us to speed up and to encourage competition between crews,” she wrote. “It’s a bribe.”

Also from Chicago, Don Hammond sent in a \$25 Christmas bonus given out by bosses at a meatpacking plant “that was one of the most dangerous jobs I have worked,” he wrote. Communists use the term “blood money” to describe production, attendance, safety and other bonuses the bosses “give” in an effort to bribe workers from resisting speedup, low pay and unsafe working conditions. Socialist Workers Party members and supporters give this money to the SWP’s Capital Fund, to strengthen the party’s long-term work.

Laura Garza in Los Angeles sent in \$914.53, back pay from the rail bosses after they finally signed a new contract with the union. “Back pay was one of the things the carriers used to sell the contract,” wrote Garza. “The pact hikes workers’ health care costs, doubling maximum out-of-pocket expenses.”

If you’d like to turn your bosses’ attempted bribes into something that helps advance the working-class movement, contact the SWP in your area listed on page 8.

— BRIAN WILLIAMS

THE MILITANT

African refugees fight Israel gov’t deportations

The working class in Israel faces the same challenges confronting workers around the world. The ‘Militant’ covers working-class struggles there, from opposing deportations of African refugees to strike battles to the need to fight for recognition of a Palestinian state and of Israel.



ActiveStills/Oren Ziv

African refugees, supporters protest against mass deportations Jan. 22 in Herzliya, Israel.

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US to Puerto Rico: Pay bonds!

Continued from front page
in Puerto Rico call the junta? The board was given dictatorial power over the U.S. colony’s finances by the U.S. Congress in 2016 to maximize payment on the island’s \$74 billion debt.

An immediate increase in aid and urgent measures to repair the damage? Cut the people of Puerto Rico a break?

Not a chance. FEMA announced Jan. 29 that everything had improved and it was ending its already too-meager food and water distribution. Two days later, after an outcry of criticism, agency leaders backed off, saying it was all a misunderstanding.

Half the population of the island lives in what is called “informal” housing — homes they’ve built themselves with help from family and friends with no legal title. More than 13,000 families have been denied FEMA reconstruction aid, largely with this as the excuse.

And the oversight board? On Jan. 31 board Chairman José Carrión said that despite the “radically changed” reality, serious “structural reforms” — that is, finance payback to bondholders on the backs of working people — must move ahead.

His demands? “A real labor reform that permits us to compete effectively”; “tax reform that encourages investment”; and “welfare to work reform.”

Translation: Keep cutting wages, pensions and benefits and laying off government workers; cut taxes for the employers; and force people on food stamps to work somewhere, no matter the wage, or lose their benefits.

“These have to be adopted now!” Carrión demanded. “So that our economy grows again, generates more wealth and YES, allows us to pay a fair, reasonable and sustainable part of the debt that we have to our creditors.”

“But the vulture funds have already recovered their investment many times over,” Luis Aristud, an insurance adjuster and president of the Association of Sports Fishermen in Canóvanas, told the *Militant* by phone Feb. 2, referring to the specu-

lators and bondholders who hold the debt.

“Really,” he said, “what everybody here would like is to cancel the debt.”

Washington pushes privatization

Taking advantage of widespread resentment over the bureaucratic mismanagement by the bosses at the state-owned Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, the junta is pushing proposals to privatize and sell it.

The hurricane came on top of the economic and social devastation that has ravaged the island and intensified since 2007 as a result of the world-wide capitalist economic crisis and the anti-working-class measures taken by Washington and the colonial regime.

To pay the debt, the Power Authority stopped modernizing its equipment and electrical grid, laid off union workers and cut back on maintenance. Fox News reported Feb. 1 that while most electric companies use three to four different transformers in their network, Puerto Rico’s ancient system uses more than 200. The hurricane was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

After the storm the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA took control of coordinating efforts by the Power Authority, U.S. electric companies and private contractors to restore power. The Army Corps and Power Authority bosses have traded accusations as to which one bears the most responsibility for the disastrous lack of progress.

“The big fish eats the little fish,” Rev. Rufino Carrión said by phone from Gurabo, Puerto Rico, Feb. 3. While U.S. officials and bureaucrats at the Power Authority squabble, “it’s the working class, the poor class, that is suffering the abuse.”

Carrión organized a protest in Gurabo in early January demanding electricity. He said he knew about the Cuban government’s offer to send brigades of electricians to help, which was cavalierly refused by Washington and the government of Puerto Rico. Aid has also been offered from Mexico and other neighboring nations. “Let them come from

Oscar López: ‘Crisis in Puerto Rico is colonialism’



Militant/Brian Williams

NEW YORK — Some 100 people attended a meeting at Hostos Community College in the Bronx here with Puerto Rican independence fighter Oscar López Rivera Feb. 1. Asked what he saw in Puerto Rico when he returned there after serving 36 years in U.S. prison on frame-up seditious conspiracy charges, López said, “I came home to do two things — to work and to struggle. Prison itself was like going through a different university, experience became knowledge.”

López visited Cuba in mid-November, something, he said, he had wanted to do “for a long time.” He was welcomed to the island by Fernando González, president of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP). González, one of five Cubans framed up and imprisoned by the U.S. government for their activities in defense of the Cuban Revolution in southern Florida, shared a cell with López for four years. “Cuba represents the best example of what human solidarity is,” said López. “They send doctors around the world, most recently in response to the earthquake in Mexico.”

He was asked about the impact of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and Washington’s lack of response. “The real crisis in Puerto Rico is colonialism,” López said. He described what has happened in his hometown, where power was restored “through the efforts of retired electrical workers putting up the poles,” he said.

“FEMA said they shouldn’t have done it and tried to undo this,” he said. Sponsors of the meeting included the Puerto Rican Student Organization, ALMA, Hostos Unidos por PR, and Common Ground student clubs. López also spoke at Trinity Lutheran Church in Brooklyn and at the Iglesia Santa Cruz Church in Manhattan’s Washington Heights.

— BRIAN WILLIAMS

wherever, it’s no problem,” said Carrión. “If Mexico, if communist Cuba, whoever, want to help they should be allowed to do it.”

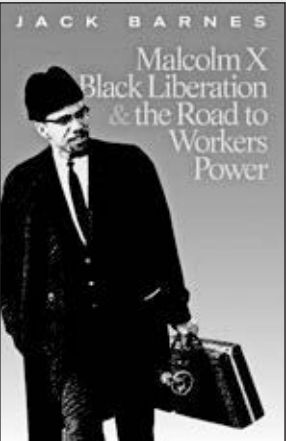
More than 50 supporters of independence for Puerto Rico protested Feb. 1 in front of the meeting of the junta in New York’s Wall Street district. “Struggle yes, surrender no!” they chanted in Spanish.

Selling the electric company to U.S. capitalists would just deepen the web of colonial exploitation and oppression of the people of Puerto Rico, Lorraine Liriano, a spokesperson for Call to Action on Puerto Rico, told participants.

“Puerto Rico is not just an issue for Puerto Ricans,” she added. “We face the same questions in the U.S.”

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Nassar sex abuse trial

Continued from front page
women athletes, many of them teenagers or younger, including gymnasts, runners, divers and swimmers, when they were injured and in pain. Instead, he used his position to sexually molest them.

There had been accusations of sexual improprieties against Nassar going back more than 20 years, but they were not treated seriously by the authorities, from local police to the FBI, from U.S.A. Gymnastics to Michigan State.

That Nassar's victims finally got a hearing and he was charged and convicted for his crimes was an advance for women and working people, a result of the recent outcry against such abuse. But the way the trial was led and the sentencing by Judge Rosemarie Aquilina was a blow against the rights of working people.

According to the Code of Judicial Conduct that is supposed to guide the work of state judges, every person should be treated fairly, with courtesy and respect. This didn't happen here.

The capitalist criminal "justice" system is supposed to guarantee a "fair trial," but workers know this rarely works for them. But it's in our interests to fight for our rights and speak out whenever they are abridged — otherwise the rulers can set precedents that will be used with great force against the workers' movement.

After Nassar had pled guilty to seven counts of sexual misconduct, Aquilina gave the floor to every woman who wished to speak about her experiences at his hands, whether they were involved in the case or not, more than 150.

"I just signed your death warrant," the judge told Nassar, handing down a 40- to 175-year sentence. This was on top of the 60-year sentence he had gotten on child pornography charges in December.

While judges can say what they think during sentencing after the guilty verdict, Aquilina's comments encouraged violence against him. "Our Constitution does not allow for cruel and unusual punishment," she said. "If it did, I have to say, I might allow what he did to all of these beautiful souls — these young women in their childhood — I would allow someone or many people to do to him what he did to others."

As the judge, not the prosecutor, Aquilina was supposed to be neutral, impartial, assuring the defendants' constitutional rights. Instead, she showed hostility and anger toward Nassar. She mocked a letter he sent her, throwing it away in front of him. She acted like he had no rights.

The *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and others publications ran articles lauding Judge Aquilina and her derision of the defendant. In the name of speaking for women, the propertied families that own the media were pleased to toss workers' rights out the window.

When we see the rights of any defendant in the capitalist "justice" system attacked, no matter how heinous the crime committed, it is in the interests of the working class to jealously guard rights won in blood. Sentences of some 200 years, like that given to Nassar, are not in our interest.

The "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" atmosphere around Nassar was also on display at his third trial in Michigan, where he was sentenced to an additional 40 to 125 years for sexual abuse at the Twistars Gymnastics Club.

In the wake of the Nassar sex-abuse revelations, many of the officials and directors of the schools and training centers he worked at — who certainly knew about what he had been doing and did nothing — have resigned. This includes the board of directors of U.S.A. Gymnastics and the Michigan State president and athletic director. The well-known Karolyi training center has closed and additional investigations are underway.

"The victims wouldn't be here had adults and authorities done what they should have done 20 years ago," said Rachael Denhollander, who accused Nassar in 2016 of sexually abusing her when she was 15 years old.

Liriel Higa, a gymnast on the U.S. National Team from 1994 to 1998, wrote an opinion piece in the *Times* Jan. 23 titled "U.S.A. Gymnastics Still Values Medals More Than Girls." She said, "A 2016 IndyStar investigation revealed that over 20 years, at least 368 gymnasts had claimed some form of sexual abuse by their coaches, gym owners, or other adults — almost certainly a vast undercount of victims."

"Most important, if most challenging: Fix the culture that allowed the abuse to flourish," Higa wrote. "It means telling coaches that physical and emotional abuse of any gymnast is not O.K."

But the culture can't be "fixed." It's an integral product of the immoral dog-eat-dog capitalist system, which breeds competition and abuse in the race for profits. Even some relatives kept quiet about what they knew was going on so as not to interfere with

New edition of 'Our History' launched at Havana Book Fair



Militant/Jonathan Silberman

HAVANA — An overflow audience of over 100 attended the Feb. 6 launching here of the second edition of *Our History Is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution*. Published by Pathfinder Press, it is based on multiple interviews with Cuban generals Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong. The event was part of the annual Havana International Book Fair. Pictured above at the speakers platform, from left: Choy; Chui; moderator Martín Koppel; Mary-Alice Waters, Pathfinder president and the book's editor; Gen. Harry Villegas, who initiated the work that led to the book; and Iraida Aguirrechu, editor of the Cuban edition published by Editora Política. Among those attending were numerous combatants who fought alongside Choy, Chui and Sío Wong in Cuba's revolutionary war of 1956-58, and a sizable delegation from Havana's Chinese-Cuban community.

— MARTÍN KOPPEL

their child's potential career.

Aly Raisman, the Olympic team captain in 2012 and 2016 and an Olympics gold medalist, who testified about own abuse, said of the system, "Their biggest priority from the beginning and still today is their reputation, the medals they win and the money they make off us."

The culture of "medals" and "money" can only be gotten rid of by fundamentally changing society from top to bottom — by the working class taking political power and carrying through a socialist revolution.

Sexual harassment and abuse will continue as long as women's oppres-

sion is a pillar of capitalism. But women and the workers' movement can expose these injustices and fight against them, like the women who stood up and told the truth about Nassar. At the same time, we have to fight to defend the democratic rights we need.

Communist Continuity and the Fight for Women's Liberation

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Fla. ban on vote for former felons ruled unconstitutional

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

In another advance for political rights, federal Judge Mark Walker ruled Feb. 1 that Florida's lifetime ban on former prisoners with felony convictions being able to vote is unconstitutional. The ruling comes just nine days after almost a million people signed petitions placing a proposed amendment to Florida's state constitution reinstating voting rights to over 1.5 million former felons on the November ballot.

"If any of these citizens wishes to earn back their fundamental right to vote," Judge Walker wrote in his decision, "they must plod through a gauntlet of constitutionally infirm hurdles. No more."

The judge ruled that roadblocks the state puts in restoring former felons' right to vote — especially the fact that the final decision on all applications for so-called "clemency" is reserved to the sitting governor — violates the First and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution that guarantee free association and speech, due process and equal protection under the law.

The federal case was filed on behalf of nine former felons — seven of whom

had their clemency applications rejected — and the 1.5 million other disenfranchised former prisoners in Florida. They're represented by the Fair Elections Legal Network, a voting-rights organization based in Washington, D.C.

"The system is broken, and now we know not only is it broken, but the courts are saying it's unconstitutional," Desmond Meade, a law school graduate who has a felony conviction and who helped organize the ballot initiative, told the *Miami Herald*.

Workers with former felony convictions who want to apply to get their voting rights restored must wait at least five years after being released before they can make their request to Florida's Office of Executive Clemency. They're then subjected to a far-reaching investigation, with state officials prying into details about their life, work history, traffic tickets or other arrests, family income, even their drinking habits.

The board only meets four times a year and it can take a decade or longer for a case to be heard. There is currently a backlog of more than 10,000 applications.

Gov. Rick Scott seized control over

the system after he took office in 2011, putting himself in charge of all decisions. He threw out the process previously in effect, where many former felons had their rights restored without having to be subjected to a long, humiliating and burdensome rigmarole.

If you make some mistake, or miss a deadline, or the governor just doesn't like you or your politics, your application is thrown out. You have to wait at least two years before you can reapply. Judge Walker pointed out that Scott also had arbitrary power to extend the time before he would allow reapplication, writing that some cases took up to 11 years, and, "in one particularly punitive example 50 years for a 54-year-old man."

The judge requested that both the attorneys for the former prisoners and for the state submit briefs by Feb. 12 on possible "remedies."

Some one-quarter of the country's over 6 million disenfranchised former felons reside in Florida. Under Scott's law, more than 10 percent of the state's population is denied the right to vote, including 23 percent of all African-Americans.

—ON THE PICKET LINE—

School bus drivers in Seattle strike for health care, pensions

SEATTLE — Some 400 school bus drivers, members of Teamsters Local 174, went on strike against First Student bus company here Feb. 1.

First Student is the largest school bus operator in North America, with over 50,000 workers in more than 1,000 school districts. Drivers have been forced out on strike in Pasadena, Glendale and Alhambra in Southern California; Montreal; Manchester, England; as well as Seattle so far this year. It's a subsidiary of FirstGroup in the United Kingdom, one of the largest bus operators there.

The company is notorious for having rock-bottom wages and unsafe working conditions. "Their business model is based on paying their employees as little as possible with no benefits," Teamster spokeswoman Jamie Fleming told the *Seattle Times*.

"I'm here because I want the company to give people what we deserve," Barbara King, who has worked 32 years as a driver, told Socialist Workers Party members who visited the strike picket line in solidarity Feb. 2. "You hear about how a lot of people in this country are just a couple paychecks from being homeless. Well, the company wants to add us to that list!"

The main issues are health care and pensions. People on the picket line told us that many of the drivers work a split shift totaling only four to six hours a day.

The company claims it agreed to cover health care for part-time workers, but drivers on the picket line said that the family monthly cost would be at least \$1,000.

Abe Taylor, Teamsters 174 business agent, told us only a quarter of the 400 drivers are classified full time. "While workers work four to six hours a day, they must be available and ready for work 12 hours a day," he said.

The company urged workers to cross the picket line, he said, offering full-time hours to anyone who would scab, as well as an extra \$25 a day and free lunch.

The next day SWP members knocked on workers' doors in the neighborhood near one of the bus barns. We talked to Jai Washington, who told us she sympathized with the bus drivers.

"This is an inconvenience for me because I have to have my child use Metro buses rather than the school bus," she said. "But everyone is entitled to decent health care coverage and I hope

they get what they deserve."

Teamsters Local 572, which represents the drivers in Southern California, announced Jan. 31 that it had reached an agreement with First Student there after a two-week strike. In addition to better pay and benefits, one of the main issues had been safety on the job. Driver James Motty told the press that he reported broken equipment on his buses numerous times, but was ordered to drive them anyway.

—Edwin Fruit

School bus drivers in Quebec fight for higher wages

MONTREAL — Some 100 school bus drivers braved freezing cold to conduct a spirited rally in front of the Transco headquarters here Jan. 31. The drivers, members of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) held the rally as part of a two-day strike action Jan. 30-31 protesting bosses' demands for a concession contract.

"We wanted to show the boss and the government that we are determined to be recognized," Victor Escobar, who's been working there for four years, told the *Militant*. "We are also looking for parents' support. We are doing this for them and their children."

Carole Laplante, local union president, said the company proposed a five-year contract with no pay raise the first two years and then just 50 percent of the Consumer Price Index rate for the next three years. The unionists rejected the offer by 98 percent, demanding a three-year contract with 2 percent raises each year.

The 330 drivers transport almost 15,000 children each day. Transco is part of First Student, the largest school bus operator in North America.

—Joseph Latour

Strikers from three companies hold joint rally in Manchester

MANCHESTER, England — Some 200 UNITE union members on strike here and their supporters joined forces Jan. 26, marching through the city center to a rally at the Mechanics' Institute.

Maintenance workers from Mears joined IT workers from Fujitsu and



Militant/Joseph Latour

School bus drivers in Montreal picket Transco, part of multinational First Student company, Jan. 31. Drivers also struck against company in Seattle, California and Manchester, England.

bus drivers from First Manchester. The Mears workers have been on strike first three and now four days out of five each week since May 2017. "We are paid up to £5,000 [\$7,000] less a year than other maintenance workers," shop steward Billy Sinclair told the rally. "We are not taking a step back now. And we will support Ian Allinson!"

Allinson, a worker and union representative at Fujitsu, told the rally how he was fired Jan. 12 in the midst of workers ongoing fight against layoffs. This is the third time they've voted to strike.

First Manchester drivers, at the Rusholme depot, carried flags and banners saying, "Pay parity for Rusholme bus drivers." They have been on strike three days a week since October fighting for higher wages. They get paid £9.55 per hour, whereas drivers at the company's other Manchester depot are paid £12.10 per hour.

—Catharina Tirsén

Albany hotel workers beat back concession contract demands

ALBANY, N.Y. — For four months workers at the downtown Hilton Albany have mobilized informational picketing and rallies against the bosses' concession demands, winning growing solidarity from unionists and others in the Capital Region. They voted to approve a new contract Jan. 24 that pushed back proposed cutbacks.

With the victory, the New York Hotel Trades Council, which represents the 147 workers, ended its boycott of the 385-room hotel, the largest in the area. It's located blocks from the state Capitol and government buildings.

The union contract with Long Island-based United Capital real estate investment company, which acquired the hotel in 2015, expired in April 2017. Bosses proposed eliminating a week of vacation, shortening bereavement leave from five to three days and replacing workers' pensions with a 401(k) plan. These concessions were dropped in the contract that was adopted, and workers won a wage increase.

Hotel workers on their days off, joined by union staffers from Washington, D.C., New York and other cities and by Albany-area workers, would chant "No contract, no peace!" and "Don't check in, check out!" in front of the Hilton. Several expanded picket rallies attracted large crowds. Management parked a large U-Haul truck outside the hotel entrance, trying — unsuccessfully — to prevent customers from seeing the pickets.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a prominent Democrat with presidential ambitions who poses as a "friend of labor," waited for over a month after picketing began to tell state agencies to stop patronizing the hotel.

—Midge Tannenbaum

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



February 19, 1993

Coal miners in West Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana set up picket lines February 2 against Peabody Holdings Co., the nation's largest coal producer. Some 7,000 members of the United Mine Workers of America are involved in the strike. The UMWA struck Peabody after negotiations broke off with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association.

Many coal companies, including Peabody, use an antiunion practice called "double breasting." Through this tactic, new coal mines are opened under concealed ownership. The operators then hire nonunion miners while laying off at union-organized mines. The procedure directly contradicts a clause in the 1988 contract that requires coal companies to hire laid-off UMWA members for three of every five jobs in nonunion mines owned by BCOA companies.



February 19, 1968

Feb. 13 — Late this afternoon, Lyndon Johnson responded to the critical setback of Washington's military and political situation in South Vietnam by ordering 10,500 more GIs to the battlefield. These forces will probably be drawn from troops already trained but not previously scheduled for duty in Vietnam. This will bring the total U.S. troop strength to 510,500.

At the beginning of the third week of the revolutionary offensive, the guerrillas continue to hold sections of both Hue and Saigon. Where the rebel forces have withdrawn, whole sections of cities have been bombed to rubble by the U.S. and its Saigon puppets.

In three years, the U.S. devastation of the countryside has driven about two million peasants into refugee hovels in the cities. That number has been increased by a quarter in the last 12 days.



February 20, 1943

The Rumanian government announced its willingness to allow 70,000 Rumanian Jews to leave that country for any refuge selected by the Allies.

The more than 10,000,000 Jews of Europe and North Africa have undoubtedly been the chief sufferers at the hands of capitalism in its most horrible manifestation: fascism.

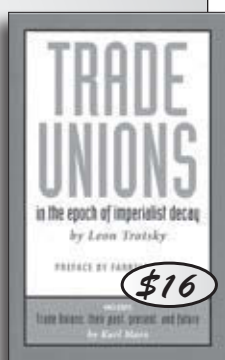
Before the war, when hundreds of thousands of German and Austrian Jews clamored at American consular offices for permission to enter the United States, only a trickle were allowed visas. The great majority had to wait for deportation to the slave-ghettoes of Eastern Poland, en route to certain death at the hands of fascist detachments.

Only by a mass outcry, not only from the Jewish-American, but the American masses as a whole, can the doors of life be flung open to these 70,000.

Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay

BY LEON TROTSKY

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"Trade Unions: Their Past, Present, and Future"
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Kurds mobilize against attack

Continued from front page

Recep Tayyip Erdogan has clamped down on opposition to his war, jailing hundreds for the “crime” of raising questions about it on the internet.

Turkey’s capitalist rulers see the gains made by Kurds in developing autonomous areas in northern Syria as a threat to their efforts to prevent the 15 million Kurds inside Turkey from fighting for their national rights.

There are more than 30 million Kurds divided among Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. The capitalist rulers of the four countries share a common interest in pushing back the Kurdish national struggle. The Kurds are the largest nationality in the world without their own state.

Erdogan insists the Turkish rulers will take Afrin and then march across northern Syria until the Kurds are cleared away from the areas close to the border with Turkey up to Iraq. His government demands that Washington withdraw its troops from Manbij, 60 miles east of Afrin and Erdogan’s next target.

Washington has said it has nothing to do with Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) fighters in Afrin, and refuses to do anything to get in the way of the Turkish government’s assault. They just ask Erdogan to make it quick.

But in Manbij, and the large swath of Syria from Deir el-Zour, Tabqa and Raqqa to the Iraqi border — where the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces has been decisive in defeating and driving out the reactionary Islamic State — the U.S. rulers have built bases, stationed over 2,000 troops and plan to stay. They say they want to prevent any instability that can lead to a resurgence of IS, but their central goal is to block any further advances by the cleric-led Iranian regime.

Washington seeks to push back Tehran’s rising influence without deploying substantial numbers of U.S. troops in Syria.

Just south of Afrin, Iranian-backed militias and Russian air forces are backing an intensified offensive by the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad to retake the densely populated Idlib province, controlled by Syrian opposition forces, including Free Syrian Army units and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham,

formerly the al-Qaeda affiliate there.

Idlib’s population has swelled by an estimated 270,000 in the past month as people have fled there from other parts of the country, retaken by the Syrian government and its allies.

The Free Syrian Army originated among units of Assad’s army that broke with the regime as it moved to drown in blood the popular protests that broke out in 2011 demanding an end to Assad’s rule. The Turkish rulers gave refuge to these forces, trained and backed them, but their alliance with other rebel forces failed to overthrow Assad. Moscow intervened and the Iranian rulers stepped up their use of ground troops alongside Tehran-backed Hezbollah and other Shiite militia forces to fight for Assad.

The rulers in Iran were among the big winners in Syria, carving out a land bridge from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon to expand their counterrevolutionary reach. But Tehran’s wars have fueled widespread working-class unrest across Iran.

Disaster for working people

The Assad regime’s bloody attempt to hold on to dictatorial rule and efforts by various capitalist regimes to reinforce their position have been devastating for working people in Syria. Some half a million people have been killed in the civil war and 13 million, more than half the population, forced from their homes.

Working people elsewhere in the region — most sharply in Yemen — also face disaster from the conflicts between Tehran and its central rival



Solidarity convoy coming from cities across northern Syria to Afrin in support of Kurds resisting Turkish government’s invasion. Convoy arrived Feb. 6 to warm welcome from residents.

the Saudi monarchy.

The rulers in Saudi Arabia continue to enforce a partial blockade of Yemen, restricting the import of food and fuel while some 8.4 million Yemenis are on the brink of starvation. Over a million people are believed to have cholera and half the country’s health care facilities no longer function.

Riyadh aims to push back Shiite Muslim Houthis, who are backed by the Iranian regime. The Saudi rulers’ conflict with the Iranian rulers also fuels their push to remove some of the tribal-based social and political relations that are a hurdle to capitalist “modernization” at home. Without this, they have no chance of taking on Tehran.

In the course of a three-year civil war between contending capitalist forces in Yemen, the Saudi-led military alliance has launched thousands

of airstrikes against areas controlled by the Houthis, who seized Sana’a, the capital, in 2015. Houthi leaders, with the patronage of Iran’s capitalist rulers, now control large parts of northwestern Yemen.

The Saudi rulers aim to bolster forces loyal to U.S.-backed President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who now resides in Saudi Arabia.

Under both the Barack Obama and Donald Trump administrations Washington has provided bombs, intelligence and support to the Saudi-led coalition. On Jan. 30 fissures deepened within the alliance. Forces supported by the United Arab Emirates battled their former partners and seized control of the city of Aden and are now pressing for a revival of the formerly independent country of South Yemen from which to organize their rule.

Protest Turkish rulers’ assault on Kurds in Afrin!

BY TERRY EVANS

Across the Kurdish region in northern Syria, in Iraqi Kurdistan, in Europe and North America and cities around the world, opponents of the Turkish government’s deadly bombing and ground invasion of Afrin canton in northwest Syria have taken to the streets to protest the assaults. The Turkish rulers aim to drive the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) out of Afrin and deal blows to the Kurds’ fight for national rights across

the region. So far they have made little headway.

Kurds and their allies, including Yazidis and Christians, from Raqqa, Deir el-Zour, Manbij and elsewhere, were part of solidarity convoys of hundreds of buses, cars and motorcycles that converged on Afrin. The main contingent from northeast Syria, which had to pass through Syrian government checkpoints that stand between the two Kurdish areas, entered Afrin Feb. 6. Residents in the city lined the streets to welcome their arrival.

“We came all this way to tell our brothers in Afrin they are not alone and that we are with them,” Qamra Ali from Qamishli told the *Daily Star*. Two days earlier thousands of Afrin residents had turned out to protest the assault by the Turkish army and Free Syrian Army forces they train and finance.

The convoy and public street protests throughout Afrin province are one sure indication of how little progress Ankara’s forces have made. Even with an enormous advantage in firepower — air power, artillery and tanks — they are having serious difficulty against the Kurds and the deep support they have among working people in the area.

In Iraqi Kurdistan protests against the Turkish rulers’ assault took place in Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Feb. 3 and in Halabja Jan. 31.

Kurds in Halabja had themselves received solidarity from Iranian Kurds in 1988, when the U.S.-backed Saddam

Hussein regime dropped deadly chemical weapons on the town, killing 5,000 residents and injuring 10,000 more. When those fleeing the horrifying attacks reached nearby Iran, Kurds there lined the roads to offer whatever they had to the refugees.

On Feb. 5 high school students and teachers in Kobani — where YPG fighters successfully defended that city at great sacrifice from Islamic State in 2014 — demonstrated in solidarity with Kurds in Afrin. During the battles in Kobani, YPG fighters got support from Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga forces.

“We defended Kobani yesterday, we will defend Afrin today,” Sarkawt Abdullazada told a rally of over 100 Kurds and their supporters in Auckland, New Zealand, Feb. 3.

“We join you in opposing the Turkish government’s military assault against the Kurdish people in Syria and we condemn Washington and Moscow for giving a green light to this aggression,” Patrick Brown told demonstrators, speaking for the Communist League.

Actions in Bonn, Germany; Rotterdam, Netherlands; and Paris and Strasbourg, France took place Feb. 3 and 4.

Dozens of people protested in Union Square in New York City Feb. 3, chanting “Hands off Afrin.” That same day Kurds and their supporters rallied in Toronto.

Mike Tucker in New Zealand contributed to this article.

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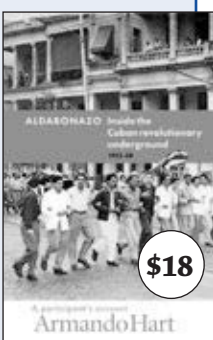
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1961 literacy campaign 'changed Cuban society'

Continued from front page

center that night. Aguilera also visited the university's Literacy Center and spoke at Trinity College.

She then traveled to Boston, where she spoke to 40 people at the well-known Encuentro 5 community center Feb. 2.

Most of the meetings also featured a screening of Catherine Murphy's 2012 documentary "Maestra" (Teacher), which includes interviews with veterans of the literacy campaign, including Aguilera. The 1961 campaign was launched just two years after working people led by Castro and the July 26 Movement overthrew the Washington-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista on Jan. 1, 1959.

"The literacy campaign not only achieved literacy, it changed society. There weren't enough trained teachers, so Fidel Castro asked students to volunteer. Imagine the total life change for those who left the city!" she told the Hartford CCSU meeting. "That's why we say they were teachers and they were taught. They learned the wisdom of the country people. Everyone worked together in the fields during the day — families, students, literacy volunteers. Then at night we had classes at dining room tables in farmers' houses."

Participants on both sides of the table were transformed by the revolution, she said, becoming infused with the confidence, political consciousness and moral values to run their own country.

"The literacy effort united people of different races," Aguilera said. "In Calixto García Park in Holguín, where I was born, before the revolution whites walked on one side of the park and blacks on the other. This was one of many examples of institutionalized racism that the revolution eradicated."

Most of the peasants were Caucasian, Aguilera said, and at first some objected to being taught by Afro-Cuban teachers.

"The revolutionary leadership oriented us to patiently discuss and convince the farmers that they had learned to discriminate from the old order," she said. "As the campaign went on, racial discrimination receded. Today in Cuba blacks and whites are equal in every-



Inset, Griselda Aguilera, left, after Jan. 31 meeting at Central Connecticut State University in Hartford, above. There weren't enough trained teachers in 1961 to teach everyone who needed to learn to read and write in Cuban countryside, Aguilera said, so thousands of young students from cities volunteered. "Everyone worked together in the fields during the day — including literacy volunteers," she said.

thing, with the same rights. Mixed-race couples and marriages are common."

The literacy campaign also struck a blow at social restrictions on women. "The campaign encouraged women to get out of the house and do things," she said. "After the campaign many got scholarships to continue their education."

In both Boston and Hartford, Aguilera was asked how such an enormous step forward was possible. "We were able to eliminate illiteracy across the island because of two things," she answered. "The enthusiasm of the people to do it and the political will of the revolutionary government of Cuba to carry it out. Both were necessary."

"Eliminating literacy was part of the program of the revolution and necessary for it to advance," she continued. "Fidel Castro explained this in his courtroom testimony" after he was put on trial for leading the July 26, 1953, attack on the Moncada army barracks, the opening salvo of the fight against the Batista dictatorship. Castro's testimony was printed in a pamphlet, *History Will Absolve Me*, and widely distributed across the island.

The revolutionary leader called on farmers to fight for land, on all work-

ing people to join in fighting for dignity, freedom of expression, access to education and health care, and to bring down the dictatorship and end Washington's violation of Cuban sovereignty.

What is happening in Cuba today?

One participant in the Boston meeting asked what opportunities young people in Cuba have today to transform themselves.

"What we experienced then is different from today. We shared what little we had, we gave all of ourselves to the task at hand. We never worried if we didn't have a car or designer jeans," Aguilera replied. "Today young people are affected by what they see around them — on television, the internet, what foreign tourists have. Those of us who lived through the revolution are making an effort to educate about, maintain and rescue the values of the revolution. These aren't monetary values, they're moral, spiritual values."

"Cuban doctors and young literacy teachers go around the world bringing health care and culture to working people," she said. "Tens of thousands of young Cubans leave their family and go to foreign countries, many into the hills and jungles with no comforts."

Meeting organizers used the gatherings to invite participants to take part in the April 22-May 6 May Day brigade to Cuba sponsored by the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (see editorial on front page). Aguilera encouraged everyone to go and learn firsthand about the revolution.

"Cuba is not a country without problems," she said. "We have the problem of the U.S. embargo, which forces us to pay dearly for necessary items. We have many material limitations. When you come to Cuba you'll see that much of our housing is in poor condition."

"There is a lot we lack, but we are a people in struggle and we're happy," she said, "and the day we don't have the blockade we will be even better."

"It was amazing to have Griselda here," Milly Guzman Young, who participated in the "In the Footsteps of Che" brigade to Cuba last fall and helped organize Aguilera's visit to Hartford, told the *Militant*. "It's important to tell the truth about what Cuba has done. The U.S. government tells us lies. The fact that Cuba had the literacy program, and that they accomplished it in one year, is because of the revolution. I want people to see that this is what a revolution does, to plant that idea in their heads."

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How Lenin championed fight against national oppression

Below is an excerpt from Lenin's Final Fight, 1922-23, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for February. In these speeches and writings Lenin, the central leader of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, waged what was to be his last political battle over whether that revolution would remain on the proletarian course that brought workers and peasants in the former czarist empire to power. The excerpt is from Dec. 31, 1922, letters to the party congress in defense of the rights of oppressed nationalities. Copyright © 2010 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

BY V.I. LENIN

In my writings on the national question I have already said that an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.

In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it. It is sufficient to recall my Volga reminiscences of how non-Russians are



Courtesy National Union of Journalists of Ukraine
Protesters in Maidan — Independence Square — in Kiev, Ukraine, mobilized for overthrow of Russian-backed President Viktor Yanukovich, Feb. 17, 2014. Massive actions forced him to flee a week later. Lenin led fight against Great Russian chauvinism and for national rights in Ukraine and other oppressed regions of Russia, part of revolutionary perspectives today.

treated; how the Poles are not called by any other name than Polyachishka, how the Tatar is nicknamed Prince, how the Ukrainians are always Khokhols and the Georgians and other Caucasian nationals always Kapkasians.

That is why internationalism on the part of oppressors or “great” nations, as they are called (though they are great only in their violence, only great as Derzhimordas), must consist not only in the observance of the formal equality of nations but even in an inequality, through which the oppressor nation, the great nation, would compensate for the inequality which obtains in real life. Anybody who does not understand this has not grasped the real proletarian attitude to the national question; he is still essentially petty bourgeois in his point of view and is, therefore, sure to descend to the bourgeois point of view.

What is important for the proletarian? For the proletarian it is not only important, it is absolutely essential that he should be assured that the non-Russians place the greatest possible trust in the proletarian class struggle. What is needed to ensure this? Not merely formal equality. In one way or another, by one's attitude or by concessions, it is necessary to compensate the non-Russians for the lack of trust, for the suspicion and the insults to which the government of the “dominant” nation subjected them in the past.

I think it is unnecessary to explain this to Bolsheviks, to Communists, in

greater detail. And I think that in the present instance, as far as the Georgian nation is concerned, we have a typical case in which a genuinely proletarian attitude makes profound caution, thoughtfulness, and a readiness to compromise a matter of necessity for us. The Georgian who is disdainful of this aspect of the question, or who carelessly flings about accusations of “nationalist socialism” ... violates, in substance, the interests of proletarian class solidarity, for nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice. “Offended” nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violation of this equality, if only through negligence or jest to the violation of that equality by their proletarian comrades. That is why in this case it is better to overdo rather than underdo the concessions and leniency towards the national minorities. That is why, in this case, the fundamental interest of proletarian solidarity and consequently of the proletarian class struggle requires that we never adopt a formal attitude to the national question, but always take into account the specific attitude of the proletarian of the oppressed (or small) nation towards the oppressor (or great) nation. ...

[T]he strictest rules must be introduced on the use of the national language in the non-Russian republics of our union, and these rules must be checked with special care. There is no

doubt that our apparatus being what it is, there is bound to be, on the pretext of unity in the railway service, unity in the fiscal service and so on, a mass of truly Russian abuses. Special ingenuity is necessary for the struggle against these abuses, not to mention special sincerity on the part of those who undertake this struggle. A detailed code will be required and only the nationals living in the republic in question can draw it up at all successfully. Moreover we must not in any way reject in advance that as a result of all this work we may well take a step backward at our next Congress of Soviets, namely, retaining the union of Soviet socialist republics only for military and diplomatic affairs and in all other respects restoring full independence to the individual people's commissariats.

It must be borne in mind that the decentralization of the people's commissariats and the lack of coordination in their work as far as Moscow and other centers are concerned can be compensated sufficiently by party authority if it is exercised with sufficient prudence and impartiality. The harm that can result to our state from a lack of unification between the national apparatuses and the Russian apparatus is infinitely less than that which will be done not only to us but to the whole International and to the hundreds of millions of the peoples of Asia, which are destined to follow us onto the stage of history in the near future.

It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of the debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities. The need to rally against the imperialists of the West, who are defending the capitalist world, is one thing. There can be no doubt about that and it would be superfluous for me to speak about my unconditional approval of it. It is another thing when we ourselves lapse, even if only in trifles, into imperialist attitudes towards oppressed nationalities, thus undermining all our principled sincerity, all our principled defense of the struggle against imperialism. But the morrow of world history will be a day when the awakening peoples oppressed by imperialism are finally aroused and the decisive long and hard struggle for their liberation begins.

February

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Join the May Day Brigade to Cuba

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Cuban Revolution for yourself, to be able to speak out more effectively against the criminal U.S. economic war against Cuba and Washington’s ceaseless attempts to overthrow the revolution.

This year’s brigade includes meetings with Cuban factory workers, work alongside farmers in the field, discussions with leaders of Cuban mass organizations, joining hundreds of thousands at the May Day rally in Havana and participation in an international conference of solidarity with the Cuban Revolution.

But there is an even stronger reason to go on the May Day Brigade — to learn how working people in Cuba were able to overthrow a brutal U.S.-backed dictatorship, bring to power a government of workers and farmers, and begin building a society based on solidarity, becoming different people in the process.

To learn how the July 26 Movement led by Fidel Castro developed a political program and course of moral conduct and built a movement that made one of the two great revolutions of the 20th century; how the government mobilized 100,000 young people from

the cities to the countryside in 1961 that taught nearly a million people to read and write; to learn about the internationalist missions, including the thousands of volunteers who helped to defeat the invasion of Angola by the apartheid regime in South Africa in the 1970s and ’80s; and about the kind of revolutionary working-class leadership that is needed for a revolution to be successful.

That’s the kind of party the Socialist Workers Party is building. Here in the U.S., we invite you to go with us to knock on workers’ doors and introduce them to the party, the *Militant* and books by SWP and other revolutionary leaders — including on the example of the Cuban Revolution. We explain the need to take political and economic power out of the hands of the capitalist class like working people did in Cuba.

Join us at union picket lines and protests against Washington’s wars abroad, the deportations of immigrant workers, against police brutality, for women’s right to choose abortion and other struggles in the interest of working people. And sign up now to join us on the May Day Brigade to Cuba!

Rail worker sues BNSF over firing, safety

BY EDWIN FRUIT

SEATTLE — A fight for safety for rail workers and those who live near the tracks is unfolding here as a Seattle engineer took the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway bosses to court to win damages and get his job back. James Norvell was fired by BNSF in August 2015 on trumped-up charges of damaging company property. To avoid a disaster in the Willbridge Yard and the surrounding neighborhoods in Portland, Oregon, he had thrown a runaway locomotive into reverse whose brakes had given out.

“The termination followed Norvell’s role in preventing a major catastrophe,” his lawsuit, filed last August, says, “and later exposing BNSF’s dangerous maintenance practices.”

The rail bosses tried to get the lawsuit thrown out of court. But Judge Benjamin Settle in Tacoma ruled the case had merit and set a trial date for Sept. 17. The law “expressly provides a cause of action for railroad employees who suffer retaliation for reporting railroad hazards and misconduct by railroad carriers,” he said.

Norvell gave a 14-minute interview, which is now on YouTube, to KING-TV 5 in Seattle. He explains he was transferring cars from the Lake Yard to BNSF’s nearby Willbridge Yard that night. He had started by moving some highly volatile tank cars into the yard, which already held cars full of flammable material.

He and his crew went back for another move, and he drove a second cut of cars onto a downhill track into the yard. The brakes failed and the cars started moving straight toward the tankers. Norvell told the TV crew that he reversed the engine and pulled all out on the speed, stopping the train.

“If I hadn’t been able to stop the train there could have been a catastrophe in North Portland,” he said. The company said he did thousands of dollars damage to their engine and took it out of service.

Norvell said a number of other engineers told him they also had brake problems, so he went to talk to the mechanics in the yard to try and find out what was going wrong. They told him the company had a “Band-Aid” approach to maintenance. The brakes were going bad on all the switch engines there, they said, but the company thought it was too expensive to take them to Seattle where there’s a crane powerful enough to lift and repair them.

Norvell decided to blow the whistle and went to the media. He was fired. “There are huge issues in rail, the trains are big, they can kill you,” he said. “You need to be able to know you can go to work and be safe.”

The TV crew asked Norvell why he hadn’t spoken out about problems in the yard earlier. He said he didn’t know it was so bad until he looked into the brake failure. And, he said, if you complain, the railroad targets you, looking for a way to trip you up and fire you.

Norvell said he grew up in a railroad family and worked for BNSF over 16 years. He built a 2,000-foot mini-railroad on his property and gave neighborhood children rides.

After he was fired, he moved to Seattle to get another rail job. “They took everything from me,” he said. “So I had nothing to lose.” That’s why he filed the suit.

The TV crew asked him why the company responded the way it did. “Corporate America thinks money is more important than people,” Norvell said. “They figure they can make a buck even if people get hurt.”

Liberals praise FBI

Continued from front page

the FBI continued to go after Trump, describing the roles of others associated with the Clintons, including now retired FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, Associate Attorney General Bruce Ohr, and FBI chief investigator Peter Strzok.

To get the warrant, the FBI had to apply to the secret so-called Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court.

The FISA courts are stacked in favor of the cops, no one else gets to argue before them. In the 33 years since they were set up, FISA judges have only rejected 11 of more than 33,000 requests.

Today’s scandal revolves around the fact that the FBI didn’t inform the court about who they got their information from or their connections to the Clintons. The liberals say the memo tarnishes the FBI, which they laud as key to defense of the American way of life.

“I believe it creates a constitutional crisis when the president distrusts the Justice Department and the FBI,” Leon Panetta, former CIA director and longtime Democratic operative, told CBS. “They’re the primary law enforcement agencies under our constitution.”

The liberals and left have been in a frenzy to get Trump since the moment he was elected, which they blame on the stupid, racist, reactionary “deplorable” working class who voted for him.

The tiff over the memo comes as the liberals’ “resistance” has weakened. Trump has boosted his backing from the U.S. rulers over the past couple months, after shepherding tax relief for moneyed interests through Congress, advancing U.S. imperialist interests at the Davos conference, and giving a State of the Union address proposing a compromise on immigration.

The FBI: Bosses’ political police

Working people and the Socialist Workers Party in particular have decades of experience with the assaults the political police carry out to defend capitalist rule.

The U.S. rulers’ expansion of its political police began in response to workers and farmers seeking to emulate the revolutionary example of the Bolshevik-led 1917 October Revolution in Russia. Police sought to crush U.S. communist organizations founded in 1919. Thousands were deported and party conferences were declared illegal and broken up.

Washington renamed their federal cops the FBI in 1935. As the rulers prepared to enter the second imperialist world war, they moved to revamp the FBI to target opposition. They started with the Socialist Workers Party and others in the class-struggle leadership of the Teamsters union in Minneapolis, whose fighting capacity and opposition to imperialist war were well known. The Democratic administration of Franklin Roosevelt used the Smith “Gag” Act, passed in 1940, which outlawed advocacy of revolutionary ideas.

Eleven leaders of the Communist Party were prosecuted under the Smith Act in 1949. All were convicted and 10 were given the maximum sentence of five years. The FBI helped spearhead the anti-communist witch hunt that marked the early years of the 1950s.

When Black fighters led the successful battle to overturn the racist Jim Crow system of segregation and a mass movement forced the U.S. rulers out of Vietnam, the FBI launched “Cointelpro” operations to spy on and disrupt the Socialist Workers Party, fighters for Black rights and other political activists.

In 1973, the SWP and Young Socialist Alliance launched a political campaign to expose the role of the FBI as the rulers’ political cops. The party and YSA took the FBI to court for disrupting the party’s activity in the labor movement, fight for Black rights, women’s liberation and against imperialist war.

During the SWP’s 13-year political and legal battle the scope of the spy agency’s operation was forced out. The FBI had to admit that between 1945 and 1966 it carried out 204 “black bag jobs” — burglaries of party offices — deployed 1,300 undercover informers and collected more than 8 million documents on the party and its supporters. In 1986 the SWP won the case.

The SWP campaign and other revelations it inspired helped reveal the true class purpose of the rulers’ FBI and dealt a blow to the government’s ability to use its political police. They’ve worked overtime since to try and refurbish the FBI. As in the past, today it’s the liberals who are leading the effort to shore up the FBI.

LETTERS

‘Militant’ circulates in Nepal

We have been receiving the *Militant* for many years. Thanks for the publication. We have been translating the news and views of the paper in Nepali and publishing them in workers weekly and daily for our readers. We hope you will keep sending us the publication. With revolutionary greetings and red salute. *Nepal Workers’ and Peasants’ Party*

Paper speaks ‘truth to power’

I want to thank the folks at the *Militant* for exposing the imperialist attacks against the people of Haiti and for the exposé about the New York subway system. Knowing that there is a publication that speaks truth to power fortifies my brain in the fight against economic cruelty.

Concerning the disparaging remarks imperialists like Trump make against poor nations, I ran across a passage in a book by author Wendell Berry, “If you wish to steal farm products or coal or timber from a rural region, you will find it less troubling to do so if you can believe the people are too stupid and violent to deserve the things you wish to steal from them. And so purveyors of rural

stereotypes have served a predatory economy.”

*Larry Ginter
Rhodes, Iowa*

‘Fountain of knowledge’

Your newspaper has invaluable information, and is a unique fountain of knowledge on the Cuban Revolution and about imperialism. Thank you for keeping us updated while in prison.

*A prisoner
Florida*

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

‘Militant’ Prisoners’ Fund

The Prisoners’ Fund makes it possible to send prisoners reduced rate subscriptions. To donate, send a check or money order payable to the Militant and earmarked “Prisoners’ Fund” to 306 W. 37th St., 13th Floor, New York, NY 10018.